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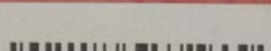

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Purdah Ladies bathing in the Ganges.

BEHIND THE PURDAH

OR

THE LIVES AND LEGENDS OF OUR HINDU SISTERS

BY

MILLY CATTELL

NN-W-70
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CALCUTTA & SIMLA
THACKER, SPINK AND CO

1916

Qpd
396.954
Cat/Bch
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CALCUTTA
PRINTED BY THACKER, SPINK AND CO.

PREFACE.

It is with the earnest wish to draw closer together the women of the East and West that I have written this book. Its pages are especially for my own countrywomen, the daughters of the United Kingdom, and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, whose homes are in, or who come out to, India. Few among them may have the opportunities I have had of knowing our Eastern sisters. But from personal intercourse I know that the majority of Englishwomen in India yearn to know more of her whose life lies hid behind the Purdah. In these pages they may find something which will help them to understand her.

My book was commenced during the Bengali agitation against Lord Curzon's Partition of Bengal, when many English believed that India was disloyal to the Crown. King George gave India (and Bengal) a chance of proving her love and devotion, and India grasped that chance to the

hilt. Still some were not convinced. My book goes to the Press while the Empire grapples in the Great War, and *after* India has proved her LOYALTY. Aye, from prince to peasant the country broke into a wave of loyalty and laid Treasures, Service, Life, and Sons at the feet of India's Emperor, our Gracious King.

My book goes forth fraught, not with the glamour, but with the spirituality of the East to socially help the Western sisters of the Empire to help the Eastern sisters within. Its pages were thought out on the house-top under the evening stars, and were mostly written there in the early morn when Earth awakens to praise the Lord. These pages represent several years of my life as governess in Indian families, mostly Purdah, where I have learned the beauty and worth of character of her who lives within.

MILLY CATTELL.

BEHIND THE PURDAH.

"Inside" is the colloquial designation for the Zenana in India, and it is "inside" I would lead you: to sit awhile in spirit with and among our little sisters within the Purdah.

The old-fashioned and conservative Hindus who pride themselves on their orthodoxy keep their womenfolk in strict seclusion, as in the days of Moslem rule.

Purdah or Seclusion of Women is not indigenous to the Hindus, but was adopted by them under Mahommadan rule, not out of compliment to, but from fear of, their conquerors, and in defence of the honor of their wives and daughters.

In the *Mahabharata* Age of India women were not kept in Purdah, nor were they ignored in society. They occupied a practically equal position with men and enjoyed social rights and privileges.

The famous story of Sita in the epic of the *Ramayana* gives us an instance of the independent and decisive attitude of woman.

When jealousy and intrigue had woven a spell of misfortune around Rama, the heir to the ancient Kingdom of Ajudhia, and he loyally submitted to the decree of banishment proclaimed against him by his King and father, the faithful Sita elected to accompany her husband in his exile. She did not wait for the command or permission of her mother-in-law as Hindu wives do in modern days. These are her words so beautifully translated from the text of the bard Valmiki by Romesh Chunder Dutt:

"For the faithful woman follows where
her wedded lord may lead.
In the banishment of Rama Sita's exile is decreed.
Sire, nor son, nor loving brother, rules
the wedded woman's fate,
With her lord she falls or rises, with
her consort seeks her fate.
If the righteous son of Raghu wends to
forests dark and drear,
Sita steps before her husband, wild
and thorny paths to clear.
Car and steed and gilded palace, vain
are these to woman's life,
Dearer is her husband's shadow to the
loved and loving wife.
And my mother often taught me, and
my father often spake
That her home the wedded woman doth
beside her husband make.
As the shadow to the substance, to her
lord is faithful wife,
And she parts not with her consort till
she parts with fleeting life."

Changes had been creeping over the face of India since the chivalric ages of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. The Moghul invasion brought a new day. The refined and cultured Hindus saw their only means of guarding their wives and daughters would be to seclude them from the covetous eyes of their ruthless conquerors, and the Purdah system of the reigning power was accordingly adopted, and became stringent all over India among the better classes or "twice born" of the Hindus.

Under British rule the necessity for so jealously guarding the fair no longer exists. A great wave of intellectual revival and an awakening of national sentiment is sweeping across the whole of India. The contact with the West is shaking the East through and through. To "the call of the East," there is now a corresponding call of the West. These twin ambitions are wrestling with each other, and though there must necessarily be a certain amount of "froth and bubble,' shall not both East and West run in together on the high tide of Mutual Understanding, in spite of the eddies and swirls of present "unrest"?

The greatest difficulty to union seems to be with the Hindus themselves. They are a conservative people, averse to innovations. The patient feet of their forefathers have left deep social ruts wherein some stick. Others have had impetus enough given them by impact with Western thought and ambitions to put shoulder to shoulder and gain the level once more. Their action has created a dual position for themselves. Hindus who have adopted Western customs are out-casted by their fellow Hindus, and are often ignored by Europeans. Or if recognised and aided by Europeans and admitted to their friendship, it is the advanced Hindu man alone who derives any benefit from the intercourse, for the Purdah comes between the women of the East and West. The Indian woman is the kernel of the problem.

The greatest sticklers for the Purdah are the old dames who rule the zenanas with iron hands. They "see not" reason why the Hindu woman should wish to do other than her grandmothers did.

In "enlightened" families these old ladies bow their heads in genuine sorrow at the innovations of the present day. Though their hearts swell with pride at the success

of the "England-returned" grandson and the tooting of his motor car, they bewail with horror and dread of what the gods may send the throwing-aside of Purdah by the grand daughter-in-law. Her achievements in knowledge are naught in their eyes, and if she cannot cook her lord's food or recite a *mantra* (prayer) for the birth of his son there is then grave cause for regrets.

Purdah (in South India: Gosha) means literally curtain. When applied to the face: veil; and when used in reference to the house or home: enclosed, enclosure, secluded, seclusion.

Within the Purdah religion rules every action of the lives enclosed therein.

It is the exactions of the Hindu religion as regards caste and food which makes social intercourse between East and West so difficult, especially between European and Indian ladies. There seems no common meeting ground. The Hindu is shut up within the Zenana, and the Englishwoman admitted therein is seldom "within the veil" of the Purdah, behind the scenes as it were. Her visit and reception are both formal and the acquaintance generally ends there, as the Purdah lady cannot return

the visit and the Englishwoman can rarely converse with her without the aid of an interpreter.

But come with me! Let us enter within and raise the veil. Let us linger with our little sisters and win, by our sympathy and desire to understand them, by our fluency in their language, an intimate knowledge of their daily lives.

The Hindu religion, with the many gross superstitions which have crept into it, rules meat and drink; all the natural functions and personal wants of the body; dress; recreation; coming and going; and every want, ordinary and incidental, of each life. There are exact rules for birth, betrothal, marriage, and death. The women, especially the elder and aged, are the hinges on which these rules depend.

Were it not for the Purdah system and the consequent neglect of WOMAN the Hindu religion would long since have ceased to exist. But the women keep it living and imperious and themselves imprisoned within the veil of the Zenana.

The Purdah system has choked the energy of the Hindu Woman. Hidden within, what need of education for her! Her sole duty

has dwindled to two points : to minister to the wants of Man and breed children. This is especially true of the Women of Bengal, and, in the wave of enlightenment and thirst for advancement which is sweeping over India, the Bengali Leaders have not been backward, rather they have been foremost, in recognising this sad fact. And, since the visit of His Imperial Majesty George V. with his Gracious Consort, the enlightened Bengalis have done, and are doing, much to free their families from the trammels of caste and the disadvantages of Purdah.

With the adoption of Purdah the Hindu woman was thrown back upon herself. Sad to say, the progress and development of India under the peaceful and beneficent rule of the British Crown since 1858 has spelt nothing to our little sister within. Religion became her only outlet and recreation, her only wand of power. The quaint old myths of the past assumed realistic proportions in her mind. The astute Brahman *gurus* (priests) availed themselves of this channel to increase their importance and augment their wealth.

The thirst of national advancement has caused a reformation in the Hindu religion,

and the purer simpler forms of the past are coming to the front again. The education of the female sex and the emancipation from Purdah will do much to sweep away the gross superstitions and degradations which exist, and " Newer knowledge drawing nigh" will bring the Truth that will " sway the souls of men," yes, and women too, for it is impossible to leave them out of the plan of God's Providence, and India will be released from the bondage of ages.

The entrance to a Hindu dwelling is almost always on the south side of the house, the zenana or women's apartments in the north side of the building. If it be a rich man's house, we pass through a corridor or curtained vestibule to the zenana, and find ourselves " inside " indeed.

If the dwelling is a presumptuous one, rooms and verandahs run in quadrangular form and enclose a courtyard open to the sky. The flat surrounding roof forms a terrace which serves as a promenade in the evenings and as sleeping-place in the hot weather nights. These terraces are often walled in, especially if in a town or exposed to houses tenanted by opposite sects.

In villages the homesteads are built adjoining each other and preserving an enclosed quadrangular space which serves as recreation ground and meeting-place for the women and children living in the hamlet.

If we linger "inside" with our little sisters and win their trust and confidence we will see the Patriarchal system of biblical days flourishing and vigorous. We will hear tales of folklore which will enchant and delight us if we are lovers of olden times. We will find ourselves watching primitive customs, practices of Mosaic law, and doings of our great-grandmothers' days which will make us slyly pinch ourselves to make sure that we are awake, alive, and breathing in this progressive twentieth century!

As we come forth again from that old-world atmosphere, and see flash past us a motor car or confront some other evidence of our own day, we marvel at the anomaly within and, in nine cases out of ten, scatter our wonder with the hackneyed words: "It is India, anything can be expected."

But, being the tenth, let us linger, whenever possible, behind this mystic Purdah and grow to know our Indian sisters. We

shall be repaid. "Inside" we shall meet with much to admire, and if we have hearts, if the Divine Spirit of Love has found an abiding place within us, we shall be drawn to our little sisters in the zenanas of India by a mighty chain, for their very helplessness appeals, and then to this helpless dependence are added many dainty charms mingled with a winsome and fearful admiration of ourselves. Bright quick eyes take in every detail of our dress and features. Breathless lips part with wondering surprise at our answers to the elder women's questions. Blushing faces bend low under gold or bright edged *sarees* if we ask the girls their husbands' names, or perhaps congratulate one on her approaching marriage. "*Sharum ki bhat! sharum!*" (Shameful words, fie!) say the venerable dames, and the girls shake with suppressed giggles. They enjoy the fun of twitting their elders for, even if zenana-caged, are they not human?

Then the mother of a first child, probably a child herself, is commanded to show the mite, and if it be a son! the sweet pride of her! her swelling breast and dewy eyes proclaim the depths of her gratitude to the great *Baghwan* (God) Who has so blessed her and

that nameless one. (A Hindu wife cannot name her husband. Such familiarity would be irreverence. Nor can the name of her husband's father be pronounced by her.)

There is much that will charm us, even if there is also that which will sadden us, in our visits to the "inside" and when familiarity has melted away all the reserve of our little sisters we may sometimes find cause for pathos and regrets in their pitiable ignorance and helplessness. We may sometimes see life sacrificed for want of a little practical knowledge. We may strike up against something which makes ring in our ears those hard words that Kipling has written:

> "For the East is East, and the West is West,
> "And never the twain shall meet."

Can it be true? We come away saddened and depressed.

But later, reflection shows us that these words are harsh and unjust, unnatural. We look aloft to the perfect sky. No dividing line is there. A gradual and harmonious blending. So with life itself and the Mingling of the Races. All shall finish on easy planes, dove-tailed and meeting gradually and finally in one perfect whole.

An old Brahman lady once said to me: (It was just after the Midnapore Bomb Outrage and we had been talking in the Zenana of the Political Unrest in Bengal.)

"Ah, Miss Saheb, *Angrez* (English) and Hindus are like milk and ghee, hard to mix."

"Yes, mother, but ghee and milk do mix, don't they"? I replied.

"They do," she assented, "but take a time to mix and need a patient hand."

"God is the Hand," I argued, "and all that He does is good."

"Aye, aye," she allowed, "but often the underlings of God make mistakes. Watch the hot ghee in the pan, there is much noise on the hearth when ingredients are mixing."

"But, mother, in the end all do mix," I pleaded.

"Yes, indeed they do if the cook is skilful and not afraid of the first splutterings."

Is not the Mixing of the Races of Man begun? Is not the Divine Mixer stirring us towards harmony, to a beautiful union and peace? Are not the present splutterings of unrest merely the Meeting of the Races in the Pans of God? Must we not work for this? Must we not help in the mixing, for mix and

blend we surely will under the over-seeing and skilful Hand of God.

Such were the thoughts which voiced themselves in the Zenana in the soft morning air whilst vegetables were being prepared for the mid-day meal. Silence fell.

Then an idle one asked: "But which will come to the top, English or Hindu, ghee or milk?"

Another, the wise and holy *Babi-ji* whose life's span was nearly run, answered from the depths of apparent reverie: "Both, ghee and milk, milk and ghee, when the stirring is well done there is no difference."

The model of a devout Hindu girl is Sita. The dream of her life is to be mated to a husband like Rama. From birth to marriage she is reared and trained in the path she must follow as wife and mother; and in modern days this path is narrow and confined.

Her first thoughts on awaking in the morning must turn to the Creator. At the head of the Hindu Pantheon is the mysterious Trinity, same as the Christian Trinity. In place of the All-creating Father there is *Brahma* the Creator. The Second Person is *Vishnu* the Preserver or Upholder of the

Universe; and our Holy Spirit is represented by *Shiva*, the Destroyer and Regenerator. *Mahadeo* or *Mahadev* is the Great God of all.

The ejaculation of "*Ram, Ram, Sita, Ram,*" rises from a Hindu's lips with the first conscious waking thoughts from life-long habit, much as the Morning Offering comes to the lips of a devout Catholic.

Before a child can barely articulate the little hands are joined and held together and the Divine Salutation is whispered in its ear.

The first act after rising is to offer, or pour water in liberation of the dead around the sacred *tulsi* plant, and before the household gods.

Each house has its altar, often only a small niche within the wall, on which are enshrined stone or brass images of the various gods worshipped. Often the feared Demon Deities are here represented.

Among the wealthier classes a room is set apart for the *Thakur* (God) and is known as the Thakurkhana (God's room). In villages a small house is kept as a Thakurkhana and is the common chapel for all the inhabitants of the village and its outlying hamlets.

Pretty practices prevail among Hindu women, especially devout and wealthy Brahman women, because they have money and leisure to indulge their piety. Deity claims a prominent and often fills the first place in a Hindu woman's life, and its human expression is her husband. For the emancipated Hindu male the human expression of the God-head is the KING, and all who witnessed the wonderful scenes in India during the memorable Coronation visit of His Imperial Majesty George V. must admit this. The spontaneous acts of homage and reverence which followed the Royal Progress through the streets of Calcutta brought a lump to many an English throat and tears to many English eyes, and showed the Hindus to some in a new light and did much to unite English and Indian hearts in one common bond. And, may I add, the Great War is cementing the bond of union under the same Ruler.

Flowers plucked to adorn the altars must not be smelled. "What! steal the fragrance of a flower you purpose to lay at the feet of *Mahadeo* (Great God)." No, the offering must be untouched, whole,

entire for the God before whom the suppliant will place it.

Cooked food cannot be served by the mother to the various members of the family before she has set aside or offered a portion to the gods.

New cloth, gold and silver trimmings, etc., purchased for ordinary or wedding garments have a piece snipped off for the dear *Thakur* (God). The cloth itself is laid for a moment before the household altar and a blessing invoked for the wearer.

On high festival days, when boys and girls are dressed in new clothes, their first visit is to the *Thakurkhana* (chapel or oratory), so that the loved *Mahadeo* may have the first sheen of the new silken garments, the first glitter of the new jewels, and the young wearers ask blessings and favours, chiefly through the medium of the gentle *Gonesh*, favourite and friendliest of friendly gods, who is represented with an immense frontage of person and an elephant's head, which makes him in Western eyes anything but an artistic object of worship. The quaint legend which explains this crowning deformity shows the wonderful depths of a mother's love and I cannot resist telling it here.

THE LEGEND OF GONESH.

IN the baby days of the world the gods dwelt upon it, beautifying and perfecting it for Man, the spoiled child of Creation.

Mahadeo, Supreme Lord of all, fixed his abode on the topmost crest of Himalaya. But the pure snow of the mountains wakened not to the touch of a godling's tiny feet. Queen Parvati languished and sorrowed.

Woman, even if goddess, knows no completion of her happiness till a babe lies in her arms. Parvati sorrowed.

The homes of the gods were for Man's example. Mahadeo noted the pure profile of her face growing sharper. He marked the languor of her eye. He folded her to his heart, whispered hope, and counselled worship of Vishnu, Giver of Life.

Cheered and consoled by her husband's tenderness and permission, Parvati set her home in order for a year, and then betook herself to the vast forest that girdles Himalaya. And on the thirteenth day of Magh began her prayer and petition.

The forest yielded her choicest fruits and flowers into Parvati's fair hands. The Queen's dainty fingers fashioned cakes and sweets. Mahadeo provided his wife with vessels, gems and gold. Daily a thousand Brahmans were fed in the glade of the forest.

Thus Parvati performed the Panyaka-vrata or Great Prayer, and held her soul pure and fixed on God.

On the last day of the Great Prayer Parvati, accompanied by her *guru* (priest) Sanat Kumara, repaired to the Ganges. This fair daughter* of God received the Queen in her gentle and refreshing arms with a stream of tenderest tears. She laved Parvati's graceful body till it shone like the moon, was as white as milk, glowed with the pure lustre of the lily, and blushed with the sweetness of the rose. The watching veiling Sky gave the deep dark of her midnight glory to paint Parvati's eyes and dress her glorious hair. Then Ganga and Sky yielded her back to Earth and Himalaya.

*The Brahmans call all rivers "daughters of God", and as they cross them salute them as such.

A Lady worshipping in her private temple of Siva. Her *Guru* is standing at the door reciting prayers in Sanskrit.

The *koel* (Indian love bird) sang a song of love as the Queen came up the mountains and entered the Palace of Iswara (Shiva).

The year of penance, prayer and purification had filled Parvati with hope. Now the ceremonies were ended, and she was home again, a weariness crept over her and she yielded to tears of grief and despair.

It is ever thus. The tinkle of the temple bell calls us to prayer. We prostrate before the altar. Flowers, lights, incense, music, lift our souls to God. Borne on the wings of exaltation our souls ascend. Our senses sleep. The world grows dim. We gaze and gaze into the heart of God. We drink of His Infinity. Rapture, Peace, Bliss, is ours.

Alas! alas! the door of the temple closed, our own threshold crossed, we return to earth, the world and its cares. Forgotten is the Mercy, the Omnipotence, the Omnipresence of God. We are of the earth and the earth claims us. Arid, hard, dry, is the ground of our souls.

Thus with Parvati.

But the gods' homes were for our example. Woman's powers of endurance must be and are unlimited. Man depends upon her for

his every need. Guardian and ministering angel of Man, Woman must forget herself. Parvati's home called for her care. Mahadeo had been long without her. Woman must always give, even though her own heart be breaking. Parvati dried her tears. Washed her face at the fountain. Sought her inner chamber. Donned silk and jewels and prepared to welcome her lord back from the skies.

In the stillness of the night she heard a voice, a wondrous voice, within her heart. It told her that her patience was rewarded. Krishna had hidden himself within her and she should bear a son.

A pean of joy fell from Parvati's lips.

The time of expectation passed and Parvati and Mahadeo gazed with gladness on their little son. They called him Gonesh.

The mother's heart is all love. Not enough that she and her lord admired the fair limbs and perfect body of her little son. All should. Parvati prepared a great banquet and summoned all the gods to it. All of them came. None dared, or wished to dare, to neglect the behest of Mahadeo, Supreme Lord of all. Yet one came with a trembling soul.

Sani (Saturn) had quarrelled with his wife, and she in vixen fury had laid a spell upon him: the moment he raised his eyes from the ground the creature on which he gazed would fall headless.

Parvati's babe lay on a golden couch with his head to the northern sky. Milk-white pearls encircled the tiny neck, chains of rubies were about his wrists and silver bands round his ankles, a chain of gold encircled the small loins. He smiled a smile of infantile grace as each God dropped a gift into the great silver salver that lay at his feet, and each admired his beauty.

Parvati noticed that Sani dropped his gift with eyes fixed on the ground, and no words of rapture fell from his lips. Oh! the mother's heart is jealous for her offspring. Ever she watches and guards her child with her protecting love. Parvati gently reproached the delinquent god and asked the reason of his austerity.

Sani sadly told his tale of woe.

Parvati laughed. The confident laugh of a good woman's incredulity. Her desire of admiration for her child could not be quenched while even one withheld his homage. She lifted the baby in her arms

and approaching Sani commanded him to forget his wife's perversity, and mark the beauty of her son's face, the noble shape of his head.

Sani called to Dharma to witness his unwilling compliance to the Queen's whim, and reluctantly turned his eyes on the baby in her arms. Alas! alas! for Parvati!

Gone was her child's head! At the glance of Sani it separated from its body and was caught back to the heaven of Krishna. Parvati wept.

Prostrate on the floor with the lifeless trunk of her babe in her arms she abandoned herself to the torrent of grief that floods a mother's heart at the loss of a child. Parvati wept, and all the gods mourned with her.

Vishnu, in pity, mounted his steed Goruda (the eagle) noted for its keen sight to fetch the head of the first thing he found. Goruda winged his flight to the banks of the river Pushpabadra where a forest elephant lay sleeping. Vishnu severed the head, and once again mounting Goruda returned with it to Himalaya. Setting the huge head on the tiny neck Vishnu, god of life, reanimated

the child in Parvati's arms and Gonesh lived again.

The gods withdrew.

But the love of a mother is all sensitiveness for her child. Parvati felt the secret mirth of some of the gods at the disfigurement of her son, and it cut her heart. She sought her lord and wept her sorrow at his feet.

The heart of God is a boundless ocean of mercy. Mahadeo felt strained at the cry of Parvati. He bent towards her from his throne of glory. He touched her bowed head. He gently chid her kneeling there.

"Thy vanity has given thy son his deformity. I cannot take it away. Even I, the Omnipotent, cannot undo what is done on earth."

Oh, the cunning and importunity of woman! The patience, humility and ingenuity of a mother's love!

Encouraged by the tenderness of the God of all, consoled by his touch, Parvati became bold (for our example).

"True! Thou canst not undo. Thou canst not destroy. Thou from whom all proceeds. But Thou canst enrich, perfect. I acknowledge my error. I bow to thy

chastisement. But thou art God. Show thyself omnipotent and all wise. Endow my son with such gifts of mentality that all humanity which is to come shall forget his deformity, that whilever this earth lasts and for all time men shall worship him for his wisdom and seek his advice."

The prayer of faith is irresistible to the heart of God. He delights to give. Out of His abundance there is never insufficiency. The cry of a bold suppliant is music in his ears. Mahadeo heard Parvati's prayer. He showered upon Gonesh such riches of Prudence, Counsel, and Policy that all mankind have recourse to him, the king in his court, the judge and lawyers on their bench, the shop-keeper on his stool, the philosopher, the woman, the sage, all kneel before him. The father seeking a bride for his son invokes Gonesh, the merchant setting out on business, the mother sending forth her son, all call upon Gonesh. His altars stand in every palace, cot and home in India, and none call upon him in vain.

Nor did Parvati forget the elephant. The gratitude of a mother is never ending. The soul of woman is always creating fresh wants.

Parvati continued kneeling before her lord.

"Is the elephant world to lose through my fault?" she asked. "Give to them some reward for what their brother has suffered," she pleaded.

"Life cannot be lost," said Mahadeo. The murmur of his voice reverberated through the mighty Himalayas, from the courts of Heaven to the confines of this wonderful earth born of the Thought of God, across the vast ocean, through the blue immensity of the sky, down the sands of time to the shores of eternity, echoed and re-echoed the decree of the All-mighty and All-wise. "No life is lost. What is given can never be returned. But to every gift gifts are added. He who gives his life for another will find a greater life in Me. Suffering is never in vain. It purifies, elevates, enriches. For every pain borne with fortitude a grace. And to every grace, received and imparted to others, graces are added. The elephant world shall profit by the generous yielding of their brother's head. All men in the days to come shall admire the Elephant for his sagacity, strength and docility. Kings and Emperors shall

keep him in state. A long length of years of life on earth shall be his. If a drop of rain enter his ear it shall harm not, but form into a lustrous pearl."

Thus Mahadeo decreed and thus it is.

But the All-wise and All-merciful is also All-justice. Sani must be chastised for the mischief his conjugal quarrel had wrought. He was commanded to walk lame for all time. And men dread the evil influence of his planet.

The worship of Gonesh is universal throughout India. In the zenanas of India he is loved with a tender love. His suffering and deformed humanity holds all hearts.

When a marriage is arranged an offering is made to Gonesh. When the gold and silver are being weighed out for the bride's and bridegroom's jewels in each home a portion is set aside for Mahadeo and then comes Gonesh's share.

No Hindu sleeps with head to the north. The power of curses lies there. A child's beauty must never be openly admired. If a man quarrel with his wife, his well-wishers warn him: "Court not the fate of Sani."

I was once in a zenana verandah with some of the ladies. The neighbouring house was tenanted by relatives of theirs. The old man there had been ill and one of his limbs was reported to have shrivelled. He came out on to the porch terrace of his house and we could see him.

I remarked: "Bohu-ji, look at Babu—he limps and uses a stick."

"What wonder, Miss Saheb," she rejoined. "Does he not wrangle everlastingly with his wife. He is now a second Sani."

The elephant found on the banks of the Pushpabadra had but one tusk, the other had been broken off at the shaft, probably in some forest fight. Hence all elephants with one tusk are called "Gonesh-*Hatti*" (Elephant).

Let us re-enter the zenana and learn some more of the ways of the "inside."

Not only when eating are the gods remembered. Before drinking water at any time, the vessel containing it is held for a moment

before the lips, and a little ejaculatory prayer or offering, of the thirst suffered and of thanksgiving for its relief, is breathed by the thirsty one.

The morning purification of the body and the libation to the gods completed, women and girls pare and slice vegetables for the midday meal, all seated on a mat or *tukta-phosh* (a low wooden platform). In poor houses the women often carry out a *charpoy* (stringed bed) and sit on it. They love to sit out in the open in the courtyard or veran-dah of their house and in villages often sit in the central square.

Potatoes and vegetables are sliced, chopped and placed in readiness for the various dishes. Peas are shelled and cocoa-nuts scraped into shreds. Rice, ghee, and condiments are weighed out and all household affairs for the day arranged. Hindu women are nearly always frugal housekeepers, no matter how great their wealth or how high their rank.

Thus the morning flits by, filled up with culinary occupations, housekeeping, bathing, the cooking of the midday meal and *Puja* (worship or prayer).

Paring Vegetables in the Zenana Courtyard.

Each member of the family, after bathing, repairs to the *thakurkhana* or chapel, and folding the hands, palms together and finger-tips pointing upwards, adores the great *Narain* (God), and lays the heart's desire before Him, invoking the intercession of special favourites among the heavenly pantheon.

Next, sitting cross-legged before the low lectern, on which lies open the sacred book for the season, she chants a portion of holy writ.

The Story of Rama called the *Ramayana*, the Gita or Sacred Song, and the *Lachmi Puran* (story of the goddess Lachmi) are the favourite holy books in the zenana.

In this morning visit, a child is led to the altar by an elder sister, mother or granny. The little one is taught to fold the hands reverently and ask a blessing. Young girls read a few verses of the season's sacred book. A married girl is a full-blown Hindu and must spend a fixed time every morning chanting the holy writ. A widow must devote still further time. Is not her life all prayer and penance?

The little brass gods are tenderly bathed and dressed. The altars dusted and adorned.

Flowers and garlands are the chief articles of decoration. *Champa* and *bael* the favourite flowers for ceremonials. All flowers are sacred in India but there are some which are more specially so. The *champa* is a fragrant yellow flower and is sometimes called Frangipani. It is regarded as the flower of Kama Devi, the Indian cupid, and all holy days and festivals are graced with its delicate blossoms, and arrivals and leavetakings are marked with presentations of the sweet scented wreaths. The *bael* or *chambeli* is the jasmine and it is sacred to Vishnu, the god of life.

In the Puja, fire is first offered to the various deities, accompanied by the ringing of a bell, same as the ringing of a bell announces to Catholic worshippers the elevation of the Sacred Host during Mass.

At the tinkling of the bell every devout Hindu, wherever he or she may be, joins hands and with inclined head raises the soul to God, for God and God alone is the centre and object of all worship.

This offering of fire is called *Arti*. After it has been offered to the gods the fire is sacred or consecrated and is then carried in the censer (*Agni*) to each member of the

family, who warms the hands before it and then, placing the now purified hands cup-like before the mouth, inhales the sacred warmth to purify the system.

In the evening *Arti*, the censer is carried through each dwelling-room or passed through the doorway to drive out the evil spirits. The fire is then carried back to the altar and extinguished.

More and louder bell ringing announces the "feeding of the gods," when food specially cooked for the heavenly beings is offered before the altar.

At the tinkling and clanging of the food bell each member of the family folds hands and raises the heart to God in thanksgiving for the fruits of the earth. This offering may be but momentary and may often be mechanical, still the practice is worthy of admiration; and if we use our eyes we will see road-farers, or passers-by, hurrying to a wayside chapel, at the clanging of its bells, to make this adoration and receive the consecrated food.

For the food thus daily offered is considered sacramental and wonder-working. It is called *Bhog* or *Vhog*. We read in the

Ramayana that Dhartirastha the King of Ajudhyia (Ancient Oudh) craved the god Krishna to grant him a son. The god counselled him to feed his queen with the *Vhog* from the shrine. There were four queens and each partook of the sacred food, and the immediate result of their faith and the King's obedience was a fourfold incarnation of the god Krishna himself; Rama, Laksman, Bharat, Shatruhan, the four heroes of the *Ramayana.*

The *Vhog* is consumed by the temple servers and in private *thakurkhanas* distributed among the members of the family and household. Other food must not be eaten before or with it. It is often considered efficacious in cases of sickness.

Vhog from various shrines, such as Jagannath in Puri (Orissa), the *Janam-Astam* or Temple of the Nativity of Rama in Ajudhyia and from other holy places is carried away to their homes by pilgrims and devotees and has, alas ! often been the cause of epidemics of cholera.

After the gods have been attended to and worshipped in the morning the *thakurkhana* is closed.

The family now meet in the courtyard, shady verandah, or within some room and await the mid-day meal.

The men of the house are first served, with the most attentive devotion, by the women. The older boys eat with their father. Small boys and girls are fed apart by a sister, aunt or mother.

The women and girls patiently wait their turn when they will be called to the *choka* by the house mother. While waiting the hour is perhaps lightened for them by the duty of feeding the little ones, and sometimes by learning puzzles from some venerable dame.

The mid-day meal is eaten in the kitchen in an enclosed square called *choka*. Both kitchen and *choka* are sacred, and no alien or lower caste foot may tread in either. Every morning the kitchen and *choka* must be first well washed with water and then newly plastered over with mud and cow-dung, before any food can be cooked or eaten therein. This washing and plastering is done by women or boy servants of the right degree of caste, or if the family is humble in position by the house mother herself.

There is no one so clean about food and person as the good Hindu, and none so fond of scrubbing, washing, and bathing. They say mud and water are the two purifiers given by God. Every vessel used for cooking and eating purposes must be first scoured with mud and then washed with water. The body is even cleansed with mud, and even those who generally use soap nowadays have recourse to river sand or mud on certain festivals when bathing in a river is part of the ceremonial.

Fire is the Great Purifier and also the Great Witness. This element plays an important part in all Hindu ceremonials. Marriage vows and all contracts are made over it and it is called *Om.* As we have seen in the *Arti,* fire drives away evil spirits and consequently the Birth Chamber must have a fire burning in it, and the "After birth" must be buried and a fire kept burning for seven days over the spot.

In wealthy families a man cook is generally kept. The office of cooking is a respected and privileged one, and the cook is saluted as *Thakur-ji.* In a Cashmerian Brahman family he is known by the high title of *Pandit-ji.* These men cooks only do the actual

work of cooking. All vegetables and ingredients are pared, sliced and left ready for the cook by the ladies and women of the household, and wherever a man cook is employed there must always be a kitchen maid, to sit by the *chula* (fireplace) and hand the different ingredients and vessels to him. He is also privileged to serve the family when they sit within the *choka* to eat.

The mid-day meal always consists of vegetables and fish cooked in several ways and rice. The evening meal is simpler and the dishes are lighter and eaten with different varieties of hand-made bread, instead of rice. When rice is eaten the diner must always have the *thalli* (plate) on the floor. But *purris* and all other varieties of hand-made bread may be eaten under less stringent rules, hence when travelling, if obliged to eat, Hindus are able to eat *purris* and sweetmeats in a railway carriage or on the wayside. In place of our 5 o'clock tea there is *Jalkia* or *Jalka* when fruit, roasted split peas and other small delicacies are enjoyed. In the morning, to break the fast, milk and fruit are sufficient.

Every zenana has one or more venerable dames, sometimes actual grandmothers or

aunts of the family and often mere distant relations. These old ladies keep alive ancient customs and superstitions and rail against the innovations which are slowly but surely creeping into the purdahed homes of India.

The age of such a dame may debar her from the strenuous duties of household and cuisine, though she may be much in evidence at times of marriages and deaths. When life flows on evenly, unmarked by the former excitement or latter tragedy, she gathers the children around her to tell them of the glories of the golden days of Hinduism, and the folklore of the past; and descending to more practical and present day themes endeavours to teach them to read and write their mother tongue.

The system of such zenana teaching is by monotonous rote. The weary pupil repeats and writes over and over again *mantras*, which are combinations of vowels and consonants, with a trembling voice and shaking hand, for granny is often a stern disciplinarian and often an unsympathetic imparter of knowledge.

The education thus given comes to an end when a girl knows sufficient to write

and read letters, for all she requires the art of letters for is to indite letters to her *susral*, husband's home, in the early days after her marriage while still permitted to remain with her mother, and when she leaves her *myca*, childhood's home, these letters of hers will be eagerly looked for by her parents, especially when she leaves them for the last time to consummate her marriage and live always after in her *susral*.

In the matter of education boys fare better. Fathers and grandfathers place them as day-scholars in some near school, and later send them to college to graduate and pass through the universities in the different centres. In the case of wealthy or ambitious families, sons are sent to England to obtain degrees at Oxford or Cambridge. Such young men are known as "England-returned" and are outcasted for ever. Nevermore can such an one, or his wife, or sons eat in the *choka* of an orthodox Hindu. Nor will his sons ever be accepted as husbands for the daughters of the old fashioned and orthodox.

But now a new era is dawning for our little sisters "within" and the education of girls is being more attended to, especially

in the families of the "England-returned" or "enlightened," who may and do send their daughters (before marriage) to the numerous schools, which are springing up everywhere, as day-scholars, and after marriage many engage governesses for their daughters-in-law.

But the great difficulty in an Indian family who desire to educate their women-folk is to find an European governess of the right sort, with the *heart knowledge* that draws souls together, bridges the chasms of race, class, and creed, and exercises a refining and enlightening influence over the whole family of women as well as the children, and wins the respectful homage and trust of the men who are grateful to see their zenanas in such good hands. Where such a governess enters, hearts lie bare before her and the influence she can wield in a silent and unassuming manner will flow forth in ever widening circles, and reach the golden shores of Universal Love and Sisterhood in the vast future of the Empire's history.

The mid-day meal or *Pate ki Puja* (literally: worship of the stomach) over, the men betake themselves to sleep or back to their employments. The women congregate

on the *tuktaposh* or on a mat or carpet and if any needlework is on hand do it. The girls are set to sew.

There is not much teaching of the gentle art of needlework nowadays. An elder sister, mother or aunt, does a few stitches and the girl picks up the accomplishment anyhow, and if naturally gifted that way may become quite clever in her handiwork, but if not, learns simply and frankly to cobble!

The garments to be sewn are simple and the adornment is generally gold or silver braid (or rather used to be) tacked on with stitches which may be easily ripped asunder when occasion demands. The same braid may be used several times, and when frayed and beyond service as dress-trimming is melted down, and the gold and silver obtained from it put to other uses. In a zenana I saw some small spoons made out of old silver trimmings.

In our day gold and silver braid is not so much worn on every-day *saris* and blouses. Lace is supplementing it even in orthodox zenanas, as it washes on the garment and is lighter and cooler to wear. Indian ladies look so dainty in their simple every-day

muslin *saris* and blouses edged with narrow lace. The Western woman's love of lace has gripped them and they will hang over pieces of *jallidhar* as they call it with the same enthusiasm of their European sisters. The old ladies say it is a frightfully expensive taste as fine lace tears so easily, but when a young woman has her whims as to dress who can say her nay!

While the girls and younger women work the elders gossip, or perhaps one of the members will chant aloud from some sacred book. Beyond such literature there is none other in old-fashioned zenanas. "What need to read stories of imagination! And in the daytime too!" *Kahanis* (stories) may be told in the evening twilight hour by granny. For the daytime are not the *Purans* (sacred old books) enough?

The favourite is the *Lachmi Puran* or Story of the Goddess Lachmi, but there are seasons when the *Baghvad Gita* is read or chanted aloud, generally in the morning and evening, and all the members of the household are expected to, and should, listen to it. In wayside temples the Gita is loudly chanted at its seasons by a *Pandit* or *Pujari* (temple server), so that the hearts of the

passers-by may be reminded of God, and raised to Him for a brief instant in the stress of daily life and toil.

During the hot afternoon hours the reading in the zenana is often discontinued. The elders will idly gossip until sleep stills their tongues. The younger ones will sit meekly by working and listening, often with avidity and sometimes with weariness, until finally they too fall asleep or indulge in recreation in guarded whispers, so as not to disturb their elders. In the cold weather these afternoon hours will be spent in courtyard or garden and in much the same way.

Thus the afternoon wears on till about 3 or 4 o'clock, when the house mother bestirs herself and wakens all to their various tasks for while the ladies of the household sleep, the maids and servants also lie about in passages, verandahs, and shady corners, sleeping too.

Pan is now arranged. *Pan* is a narcotic leaf in which are wrapped chopped betelnut, spices, and for some tobacco dust; the leaf having been first smeared with catouchou and slacked lime; a clove is stuck into the leaf to hold it together in a four-cornered billet shape. *Pan* is eaten every-

where and at all times. It is considered an aid to digestion and is carried about in little silver or metal boxes. It is used at ceremonials and is then wrapped in silver or gold foil. Wedding invitations are the presentation of two *keelis* of *pan* and a verbal "call" to the wedding. A *keeli* is half a *pan* leaf folded in the usual style.

Grain is ground in hand-mills by the servants in rich families, and in poorer homes by the girls and boys or by the housewife herself. For heavier work there is a foot-mill which in villages generally stands in the village square. The workers swing themselves up and down as they work it to the tune of some popular song or hymn. The household hand-mill is always worked sitting upon the floor. In Indian homes as much work as possible is done sitting on the floor. An upright position is the result of sheer necessity.

After the afternoon siesta, the children's and girls' hair is oiled and combed. Brushes are never used and are unknown in some zenanas. Great pains are bestowed on the dressing of the hair, which is often plaited into many strands, and tied with bright coloured strings, which sometimes have silver

Peasants (mother and daughter) grinding grain.

tassels attached to the ends. The women and girls vie with each other in learning to plait, practising with strips of rag.

Vegetables are pared and prepared for the evening meal, and after all these duties are through or well advanced, the women oil and dress their own hair. Buxom mothers of families spend time and skill in the adornment of their tresses, and deck their luxuriant black hair with gold combs and pins. The widows look on admiringly, often aiding with suggestions or acting as hair dressers to their heaven-favoured sisters. An orthodox Hindu widow is most unselfish and self-effacing and hers is a black existence. She need not waste oil or time on her hair. All she does is to twist it into a tight knot until the prescribed time arrives for her to shave it off and go through the remainder of life with a bald head. Is she not bereft and desolate for the rest of this pilgrimage on earth?

The evening is spent in these and other light duties always mingled with chat and laughter. None can realise the vivacious wit and quick repartee of the Indian woman unless fluent in the vernacular of the country (I often think European ladies lose a lot by

not taking the trouble to acquire the language). Chaff and joke fly around and delicate and artful twitting goes on of any thin-skinned member of the group. As with us, the fun and bantering may be crisp but refined, or may broaden into coarseness, according to the degree of culture. But woe betide the luckless one who should offend the ears of the Western friend. She hears no end about it, and is ever after carefully watched and warned by her higher-minded sisters.

After sunset, or just about, there is the evening bath. And the gods must be again bathed, worshipped, offered fire and food, and put to bed. The altar is then covered and the *thakurkhana* closed for the night.

The twilight is spent in garden, courtyard, on the roof or terrace.

The poetic imagination of the zenana allows two twilights. This may seem strange to English people for darkness follows the disappearance of the sun so rapidly that we say there is no twilight in India. But our little sisters within say the first is when the sun drops into the sea, and sends up as a parting gift stars which he splashes up like diamonds from the spray of the ocean.

This first twilight is the bridal or union of the Ocean and Sun. The second is the meeting together of Light and Darkness.

This latter twilight is the time for telling stories in the zenana. In the daytime tales may not be related, for fear of the *rakshasas* or evil spirits, who may harm some *aziz* (friend) who is obliged to be travelling. I gather the idea is, or was, that the listeners are so well occupied in listening that the bad genii find their work of tempting gone, and hie away elsewhere in revenge. An old granny said quaintly to me when explaining this prohibition of telling stories in the daylight:

"*Magar, beshakk* (But, of course), in these days of the *Angrezi Surcar* (British Government) the power of the *rakshasa* over travellers is much lessened."

"How, Nanni-ji?" I asked.

"Because the *rail gharri* is worked by fire. The engine goes first before the travellers. Thus the air through which they travel is cleansed of evil spirits." (Cleansed by Fire, the all purifier.)

In olden days when the sun, the great purifier, sank to rest, travellers were obliged to stay their journey and their evenings

were generally spent in prayer and meditation. Thus the (second) twilight hours were free from danger to them by idle *rakshasa*, and tales might be freely told.

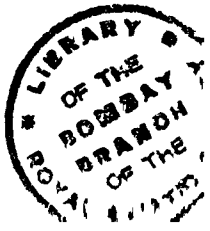
And the custom continues, and with the dusk the children and girls besiege granny and crowd round her for the story. Eyes and mouth as well as ears are all attention. Often the story is an old favourite, and when granny's memory fails her she is prompted, or if from oft-told weariness she attempts to curtail she is reproached and implored to tell the tale in the right way.

The eager listeners follow Aladdin with his lamp, Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, and many another familiar to our childhood with the same unflagging interest that we did ourselves. Then there are quaint legends of India and its Rajas. The usual beginning is "A long time ago there was a Raja and a Rani." If the tale is of Moghul days Badshah and Badshahi are substituted. The wicked uncle is replaced by a wicked *Dewan* (minister) and knights or *pahlwan* perform deeds of derring-do. The wicked heroine always gets her nose chopped off, and the good one always marries the Raja's son

Grannie telling stories in the twilight.

and becomes an exemplary Rani, or if widowed a holy recluse with a hero son.

And there are legends, beautiful legends, handed down by word of mouth from the mystical ages of India, and told with a vividness, imagery and detail which captivate the imagination and draw the soul away from the earth and its cares. Many of these legends circle round some legendary hero or woman—goddess, and all show forth some virtue in woman as daughter, wife or mother. One of the most beautiful is the legend of the Pole Star. Let us sit awhile on the house top under the evening stars and listen to it.



THE LEGEND OF DHRUBA TARA OR THE POLE STAR.

Long, long ago, there lived a great Maharajah. His kingdom was called Uthanpad. Many Rajas owned him Lord and paid tribute to him.

In his youth he was married to a fair maiden. Sunity was her name. Her face was beautiful as the moon. The sunbeams played in her glorious hair. Her great eyes were lakes of purity. Tall and graceful as a palm, she floated through Palace and Durbar, the sweetest and loveliest of all the Great God's gift to this Lord of Rajasthan.

Everyone loved her. The court bowed low in reverence before their Queen. The Maharajah's subjects called her mother. To her servants she was a dream of kindness. Service for her was a joy, a delight. The poor worshipped her. An Angel of Charity she came among them, listened to their sorrows, wiped away their tears. Great was her bounty and goodness, but the coffers of

Uthanpad were full of gold, and the Maharajah delighted to pour his treasures at Sunity's feet.

One little, little cloud appeared in his sky of love. But that little cloud grew and grew, and broke in the island of his heart. Torn by the storm and stress within his soul, the King yielded to the hunger-spirit of Self and State for an heir and resolved to take another wife. But—Sunity—! What of her?

The gleam of his love for her pierced the black cloud in his heart. Pierced and dispersed it. He sought her. In her sanctuary she knelt in prayer. He gazed on her wonderful loveliness and a great pain clutched his heart. Sunity rose from her knees and saw her lord. Swiftly, gracefully, she stooped and touched his feet. He gathered her to his heart and told her his sorrow.

The purity of her love for him knew no limit. Her sweet words consoled him. She painted in tender language his duty to State and People, how the second wife and queen should be a sister to her, how all three of them would love and cherish the little son when he came.

Consoled by the wealth of her love the King summoned his Council and told them of his decision.

In a far-off little kingdom they found a young maiden of rare dark beauty, Suruchi her name, whose horoscope seemed fair. Gurus and Rishis consulted the stars and their choice fell on her. She was brought to Uthanpad.

Great was the wedding.

Sunity received Suruchi with the arms of a mother. Bare was her womb but deep her heart. Woman if worthy the name is all mother.

And Suruchi bare a son.

Ah me! ah me! that I must tell the tale! sad it is and great the depth of Sunity's woe.

Suruchi's nature was small, like the flower of the Kudum tree when it lies shrivelled and dry on the ground. Her heart cracked with jealousy of Sunity and as those cracks widened great chasms and abysses of hate for her peerless sister-wife formed in her soul. She, she, Suruchi, she and she alone must be Queen in Uthanpad.

Slowly, secretly, silently, like a cat in the jungles, she began her work. She wrapped

the enchantment of an earthly passion around the King. Then claimed a favour. Bewitched by the glamour of her material beauty the Maharajah indulgently listened for her whim. It struck on his soul like the hand of a novice on a harp. Strained was the chord of his love for Suruchi, strained, and the melody changed to harsh discord. He could not understand the note of her desire.

While thus Suruchi faced her lord, Sunity entered. Clear and penetrating are the eyes of pure love. It needed but a glance to tell Sunity that the King of her heart was in sorrow. She knelt and touched his feet in loving and dutiful reverence. The perfume of her soul illumined the face of the King. Suruchi saw it with the eyes of jealousy.

Springing forward, she cried passionately. Maharaj-ji, give me your answer."

Once again discord awoke in the heart of the King. Waves of emotion and perplexity swept over his face. Sunity, gazing on her lord, felt the pain of his trouble in her heart. She turned to her sister-wife. Like the silver notes of a temple bell at evening

time her voice cut the troubled air. "Sister, what ails our lord?"

For an instant passion held Suruchi speechless. Then the demon of jealousy leapt to her tongue, and she spoke words of wrath and scorching hate. Burning and black they smote the ears of Sunity and the King. He wondered.

But the heavenly flame of her love burned steady and strong in the heart of Sunity, and she stepped towards her angry co-wife. "Sister, I crave thy pardon for offending thee. Is it my jewels that vex thee? Take them. All are yours. You have gladdened the heart of our lord and husband with a son. Nothing is too good for you. You desire these pearls. They are yours."

And Sunity detached a priceless pearl necklace from her throat. There they had rested, day in, day out, for years, their milky whiteness and pure lustre gaining by the constant contact with Sunity's velvet and stainless skin. Ah! those pearls, those lovely pearls! But they were not whiter, nor more beautiful, than Sunity's sinless soul.

Snatching the pearls which Sunity thus lovingly offered Suruchi cast them under

her feet and stamped them beneath her dainty slipper. The King shivered. Sunity's lovely eyes filled with tears. Holding out her arms she said with the tender voice of a mother to a spoiled and loved child: "Sister, what ails thee? Tell me the cause of thy sorrow."

"Sorrow! my sorrow! You shall know it," sobbed Suruchi, the passion of her soul breaking forth in a flood of tears. "You are my sorrow, its cause, its beginning, its end, its everything. You and you alone come between me and my lord. You cloud the brightness of my day, and all is dark between us when your shadow falls upon me."

The King started. For an instant anger swept his soul. But the pure spirit of Sunity caught his heart and held him silent. Tenderly, sweetly, she spoke again: "Sister, tell me the remedy thou seekest."

"That thou shalt leave the Palace," said Suruchi. The wrath of her passion had left her. The cunning of her jealousy showed her that Sunity's love for their lord was deep as the ocean, limitless as the sky, incalculable as the stars. She saw that no sacrifice would be too great for Sunity to make

for their husband's happiness. All this she realised with the eye of worldly cleverness. Strong purpose now held her collected and dignified. Like a Queen she swept forward in her dark beauty. , Darting a glance of enthralling passion towards the King, she said in clear tones :

" This Palace cannot hold us both, Sunity. Thou must go or I. But our lord loves thee, I will return to my mother."

" No, oh, no, Suruchi ! I need thee. I cannot do without thee," spake the King, rising from his seat and bending forward to catch her hands. Suruchi stepped back in well-affected detachment and resignation. The King moved nearer to her.

The vastness of her love swayed Sunity. Tenderly, sweetly, like the dying summer breeze, she made the renunciation of her heart's lord.

" Not thou, Suruchi, but I. Our husband needs thee. Let his happiness be thy sole end."

And turning she softly left the room.

Elated by the triumph of her victory, appeased by the desire of the King, Suruchi turned towards him. Like a rich and luscious pear her beauty gleamed and swelled

before him. As a cluster of grapes hanging in a vineyard on a hot summer's day, her beauty lured him on. Wrapped in the joy of her caresses he forgot Sunity and her pure love.

But as the day waned and passion satiated Suruchi, she sought her chamber to rest. The King was alone!

And the higher regions of his soul hungered for Sunity and her love, deep, silent, peaceful as the stars. He called for her.

Her apartments were empty. A search of garden and Palace revealed her not. Sunity was gone!

The news reached Suruchi in her inner chamber where she rested on a couch of velvet. Her victory was assured!

Laughing with joy, she flung aside her weariness, donned her richest attire and jewels, and sought the King again. Bewitched by her allurements, he forgot Sunity and resigned himself to her absence.

The days and months passed on.

Sunity had fled swiftly and silently to her room, robed herself in a *saree* of saffron colour, the hermit's dress, and left the Palace, unseen, unheeded by anyone. She

passed through the town and directed her steps to the forest, and the forest held secret her hiding place.

Sole Queen in the Palace, with none to share her reign in the heart of the King, Suruchi wearied of her conquest. Satiated with the attainment of her ambition she toyed with the King. Wearied by his passionate love she often kept the seclusion of her inner chamber and her lord saw her not for days.

Thrown back on himself, the King sought distraction in hunting. Long and difficult were the jungle paths he rode after tiger and deer. Tired and exhausted, the courtiers often fell behind their royal master and lost him in the chase.

Thus it happened that one day the King rode alone in the depths of the forest. A fleeing deer drew him on. Glade after glade was crossed and still the deer fled before him. In a rocky stream his horse tripped and fell. A sharp stone pierced its temple. The noble beast lay dead. The King, caressing the loved animal, continued the chase on foot.

The deer disappeared.

The shades of evening deepened into night and the King knew not the way. On and on he walked.

Lurid lightning flashed across the sky. The Storm God rode in anger among the clouds. He whipped them in his wrath. They washed the sky with their tears and their spent life fell to the earth as rain, and deluged the forest.

Wet, weary, cold, the King pressed on.

A spark of light flickered before him. Its steady gleam bespoke a dwelling. The King reached it. A lowly forest hut stood before him. He stretched his hand and knocked.

A woman's voice rose above the dripping rain, sweet and silvery as a bell: "Who seeks admittance?"

In the caves of memory in his heart the King's soul thrilled at the voice. He answered: "One who begs for warmth and shelter. Open."

The answering chords of Sunity's heart woke to pity. She opened the door. The King stepped in.

The rain dripped from him and formed a rivulet on the floor. His weary face and figure bore the traces of worldly care, pleasure

and sorrow. Sunity's heart overflowed within her.

Her sweet face had gained in purity. Prayer, silence, resignation to God's unknown design for her soul's freedom had placed their seal upon her. Her loveliness was lovelier. Her sweetness was sweeter. Her purity shone like a guiding star.

All the deep and higher recesses of the King's nature wakened to her spiritual ascendancy over him, and he spoke her name in the soft subdued accents of reverent love. "Sunity!"

The sound of his voice fell between them. Her soul awakened again to earth. She knew him.

"My lord! My husband!" She sank at his feet.

Sorrow, remorse, swept his heart. He knelt beside her. "Wife, forgive, forgive!"

Sunity laved his soul with her love. She tended his aching body and wearied limbs with gentle hands. He tarried in her little hut and rested. Love spake to love and all was music in their hearts.

But—the King was King and Sunity saint as well as woman. Tenderly, gently,

firmly, she reminded him of State, People, Son, Duty, and sent him from her.

Returned to Uthanpad, Suruchi's jealous eyes, anxious from the King's long absence, read the story of love's meaning in his face. She watched him in his sleep and heard the name Sunity fall from his lips. Once more the demon of jealousy raged within her, but this time in secret. She renewed her arts and again bewitched the King.

In the depths and stillness of the forest Sunity had truly known her lord, and her procreative soul had awakened at his touch. She learned that the hungry mother love in her heart was to be satisfied. And she awaited her babe with holy love.

He came. The son of her sorrow and of her joy, with the face and eyes of her lord, and the soul of herself. A little morsel of humanity sent from God and all her own. Heaven came to earth in the happiness of her heart.

She called the babe Dhruba. And Dhruba means the Constant and True.

Love unexpressed is sacred and in the deep stillness of the forest and of her hidden life, Sunity's love became more purified and holy.

Dhruba's frail being expanded and budded to childhood. Five springs of his life had come and gone, and his mind grew. He noted the deer and their young, the peacocks and their mates with their broods. He wondered.

He questioned Sunity. "Mother, why are we alone here? Are there none others of our kind, none like us?"

The pain and the possibilities of a mother's love are boundless; the wealth of her knowledge of her child's wants immense. Sunity put fresh sacrifice before herself, razed her forest altar and hearth, moved nearer to the haunts of men: for Dhruba's sake.

The pulsing life of Dhruba took more than he gave. His mother found herself forced to move again. She took up her abode in a *topobun* (hermitage) close to the capital of Uthanpad.

Dhruba was in his tenth summer, a lovely boy, bright as a pearl he throve in the rich setting of his mother's love. But his little heart held desire. Other boys had fathers. Where was his?

He fondled his mother. He questioned her. "Tell me, mother, tell me, where is

my father?" The words fell from his red lips as he kissed her cheek. They struck on her heart, the loving mother's heart that suffers so much and is rich in self-denial and sacrifice for her child.

She answered tenderly: "My Dhruba, would'st know thy father?"

"Aye, aye, mother," he answered eagerly. "Who, what, where is he?"

"He is a great King in a rich country, the bravest *pahlwan* (knight) in his court. He is handsome, noble, good. When thou growest more, my son, thou shalt see thy father."

But the heart of Dhruba was not satisfied. Desire grows and quickens with knowledge. We learn a little. We want to know more. Dhruba's eyes ever sought for his father.

There rode a Courier one day. He halted at the *topobun* (hermitage), "The King holds a Darbar (court)."

Wise men and astrologers gathered to go. Many boys followed in their train. Dhruba followed too.

At the Darbar he fixed his eyes on the King, who handsome and richly dressed sat enthroned there above his people, the evidences of his greatness about him. A

herald rose and sang his praises and orders. Rajas and knights knelt in homage before him and his sword.

"This must be he, my father," Dhruba whispered to himself. He walked fearlessly up to the Throne, and knelt before the King.

"Maharaj-ji, I seek my father. He is a King. My mother tells me he is great, rich, handsome, noble, brave. You are all these. Are you my father?"

The soul of Sunity looked through her boy's eyes. The sweetness of her tones rang in his voice. The King raised him and drew him towards him. "Who art thou, little boy?" And the King's face paled.

Queen Suruchi sat by her husband's side and she noted the child's wondrous likeness to her lord. She marked the King's agitation. Danger lay for her in the thought of Sunity having a son. She hissed to the King.

"Caress'st thou a beggar's child in full Darbar?" To the child: "Hence! away! How dare you approach hither?"

Dhruba's little heart swelled within him, swelled to bursting at the harsh repulse. Yet a King's son was he. He must not show

his hurt. He raised his noble little head proudly and walked steadily from the hall.

All marked his wondrous beauty and princely bearing. Some murmured: Truly a King's son. And some: "Our King's."

Without the hall Dhruba measured a quicker pace, and when the town limits were passed he ran with speed to the hermitage.

His mother sat at her cottage door. She caught the flying figure in her arms. "Why do you run so fast? Who follows you, Dhruba?"

He told his little tale. The tragedy of his tears found a well of sympathy in his mother's heart. His sorrow was lessened on her breast.

"But why so cruel, mother? She pushed me. She hurt me. With tongue, with eyes, with hand, she hurt me."

Sunity strove to charm away the pain with a tale of God. But the wound lay deep. Dhruba nestled feverishly in her arms.

"Will God ever hurt us, mother?"

"No, no, my son. God is the Fountain-head of life, the Heart of love, the Throne of mercy. Life deepens into greater life at

His touch. He dries our tears. He heals our woes. He shares our joys. His love is more self-forgetting and watchful than a mother's. He is the tenderest father, the dearest friend."

"Mother, where is God? I would see Him."

"He is in every atom of this living world, my child, in the depths of the forest, in the crowded streets of the town, in sun, moon and stars, in the whisper of the wind, in the thunder of the cloud, in the twinkle of the stars, in the green of the grass, in the sweetness of the rose, in the blush of the lotus, in man, in animal, in bird, in insect, above, below, around, everywhere is God. He is all that is, and there is nothing which is where He is not."

"Mother hast seen God? When shall we see Him?"

"We shall see Him, my Dhruba, when Yama, Lord of Death, presses his cold fingers on our eyes. We will sink into our last earthly sleep and from that sleep we will awake to life, real life. All clad in mantles of crimson flame our souls shall rise and float to a new life, a higher life, deep in the Heart of God."

Sunity ceased and the peace of absorbed contemplation filled her soul.

Dhruba sat silent awhile.

Then : " Mother, Mother, can men see God ?"

" Yes, son. Holy men have seen Him and do see Him. Lost in contemplation in the forest, mind and heart cleansed, freed from the world and earth's desires, they see God. He draws them to Him there. He speaks to them in stillness and solitude."

" Mother, I must see God, I shall cleanse my heart, I shall seek Him."

Pure desire is precious to the Heart of God. Dhruba's Angel bore his earnest wish to the Throne of Grace. The Heavenly court heard the petition. The Angelic Choir caught the Divine words : " It shall be granted him " and responded in notes of golden song : " God loves a pure heart wherein He may dwell."

Sunity rose from her reverie. " Come, little son, eat your supper and then to bed. The sun is sinking to rest in the arms of his bride Ocean. All nature prepares to sleep. We too must rest."

But the soul of Dhruba could not let his body sleep. He lay wakeful beside his

mother. The sound of her regular breathing rose and fell on the cottage stillness.

Without : the nests of the crows had become silent. The murmur in the trees had ceased. The bamboo leaves had stopped their whispering. All Nature waited for the secret of the Queen of Night.

She came forth from her palace behind the sun, dressed in robes of purple. The moon cast a silvery halo round her head. Her silent-winged courier Evening Star had summoned her myriad courtiers the stars, and they climbed to their places in Night's great court of the sky. Her heralds Sleep, Silence, Darkness and Mystery laid their wands on the earth. The earth slept.

The firefly world alone paid homage to the Great God of all. Myriads of these silent worshippers stole out from the grass and floated in the forest shades, deepening with their soft brilliance the mysterious enchantment of the sleeping world.

In the dark depths of the sky, Night drew with a pencil of milk a river across the arched vault of Heaven. And numerous new stars, parting gift of the tired sun as he sank to rest in the arms of Ocean, sprang from the silver spray of the sea, and took their places

on the magic scroll of *Ganga-Akash* (the Milky Way).

Dhruba rose.

In the silence and mystery, in the depths and loneliness of the forest he would seek God. He had cleansed his heart of the desire of his father. He had forgiven the angry Queen. He kissed his sleeping mother. "I go to seek God," he whispered.

On and on through the sleeping earth he passed. The fireflies, faithful guardians of the night, floated near to see who he was. Some touched his feet with their brightness. Others caressed his hair. Some veiled their radiance in his muslin garments. All let him pass. The moon directed her rays to lighten his path. The stars twinkled to him of God's coming. He understood their language. His heart pulsed with joy. He would see God.

On and on he walked.

Now Night had told her secret. She withdrew from her court. And her wearied courtier stars climbed slowly down the sky. The myriad fireflies sank to rest in the grass. Usha, the Dawn, rose to waken the sleeping earth to prepare for the birth of the Sun's son, New Day. She clad herself

in a crimson robe and wrapped herself in gentle breezes, and with her hands full of dew she descended swiftly and softly to the earth. Her courier Morning Star heralded her coming through the sky.

The trees shook themselves in the breezes as she passed. The leaves washed their faces in the dew she scattered. Nature awoke.

"God draws near," said Dhruba. His eager little heart beat faster. He took his stand near the freshness of the forest stream. He waited.

Forms and shadows moved and flitted through the forest. The creatures of the Creator's Hand woke to renewed life at the touch of Dawn and came to drink of the clear water. Dhruba waited. The mystery of the forest unfolded with these moving sounds.

A deer came. Timidly, slowly, the gentle creature approached the stream. Dhruba gazed at it. Then he spoke: "My mother tells me God is kind and gentle. Are you God?"

The graceful deer licked his outstretched hands and passed to the brook.

Dhruba waited. God would declare Himself. He was not come yet.

A crashing in the jungle. A strange cry. A whirring rustle. A blaze of blue, green, and gold. Prince Peacock danced in the forest glade.

Dhruba stepped forward. "God is beautiful. My mother told me so. Are you God?"

The peacock furled his tail and passed with his hens to the brook. God would come. Dhruba's faith did not fail him. He waited.

Now the forest thrilled to an unseen power. A strange odour pervaded the air. The animal world acknowledged its king. The gentle deer barked. The brilliant peacocks screamed. The monkeys chattered. The doves cooed. The jackals cried. Animals and birds hailed the Monarch of the Forest, Lord Tiger, who stepped to the stream.

The silent tread of his velvet feet disturbed not the jungle. The lithe grace of his stride rippled the black and golden stripes of his royal coat. His noble head swayed in majesty.

Dhruba walked to meet him. "Mother tells me God is grand and mighty. Are you God?"

The forest animals held their breath. The man child courted death.

The Lord of the Jungles paused. He gazed at the frail boy in his path. He blinked his large eyes. His jaws moved.

Then—He stretched his forepaws to Dhruba's feet. He bent his royal head and laid it upon them at Dhruba's feet. King Tiger knelt and worshipped the fearless purity of the little child.

The forest thrilled with awe and mystery.

Then the Tiger rose to his feet and he, too, passed to the brook. Dhruba held his soul in peace.

A heavenly light illumined the forest. Sweet perfume filled the air. The Breath of God pervaded the stillness. The Spirit of God descended from Heaven and revealed Himself to Dhruba, who knew his God: knew Him in the fullness of His beauty, in the perfection of His mercy, in the greatness of His majesty. The Heavens cannot contain Him, the Lord of Hosts and King of Kings. He made this wonderful world and all therein to satisfy the overflowing vastness

of Himself. Yet He came, and often comes, to reveal Himself to the tiny soul of a little child, and to fill a pure heart in spirit and in truth.

The sweet communion ended. The union with God complete, Dhruba returned to his mother.

The morning glory suffused the earth. The sun rose from the arms of his bride the Ocean. He cast aside his fleecy quilt of gray clouds and leapt above the horizon. Brahma's red geese flew before him. The sky blushed with joy at his touch. Flaming banners of pink and gold proclaimed the birth of his son New Day. The earth welcomed the bright father and son with rapture. The birds sang their sweetest carols. The koels and bul-buls piped their notes of love. The rose unfolded her petals and gave forth her sweetness. The queenly lotus opened her beauty. The whole flower world scattered the fields with fragrance and colour in love and worship. All nature sang with joy and praised the Author of life.

Sunity met her son in the glade of the forest. The wonderful radiance of his face made her heart sing. She opened her arms to him. He touched her feet with filial love.

"I have seen God, mother." And he told his wondrous vision. Before their little cottage altar together they knelt and adored.

Their simple breakfast of milk and fruit eaten, Dhruba said: "I must go to to-day's Darbar."

"Why?" asked his mother.

"I have to thank the Maharani," he replied. "Had it not been for her grief would not have entered my heart. Sorrow would not have shown me its emptiness. I would not have sought my God in the forest solitude. She has done a great work for me. I must thank her."

"You are the Maharajah's son, Dhruba," said Sunity and told him the secret of his birth.

"I am the King's son, mother? Something told me I was. But I am God's *chaila* (disciple). Dress me in pure white."

Clad in spotless garments with the holy name of *Hori* (God) engraved in sandal powder on his forehead, and a garland of *Champa* flowers round his neck, Dhruba walked to the Palace. Sunity followed him.

The King sat in Darbar, Queen Suruchi by his side. Ministers and courtiers waited

the Royal word. A little figure in flowing white raiment stepped into the hall. The purity and radiance of his young personality captured all there.

With fearless dignity and grace he walked to the dais, ascended its steps, and prostrating himself before Suruchi he touched her feet with his forehead.

"Maharani, I salute you. I thank you. Your words woke an unknown chord in my heart. I repaired to the silence of the forest. And there learned the Song of Divine Love. There I met and knew my God. This is your gift, Lady, Queen, Mother. I thank you and I love you."

He rose. He tenderly touched her hands and lips. Suruchi's heart trembled, softened, melted. She saw Sunity standing at the door. The combined purity of mother and son pierced her soul. Remorse and repentance showed her her path. Taking Dhruba by the hand she turned to the King.

"Maharaj, Husband and Lord, he is Sunity's son and yours."

The King renounced his throne and kingly state. He and Dhruba gave Uthanpad to Suruchi's son.

With Sunity the King retreated to the forest, there to learn in humility and silence the mystery of the Love of God.

Time passed till Yama, Lord of Death, came. The King left his earthly body and Sunity followed him through the flaming *sati* fire. Together their purified spirits were absorbed into the Divine Essence.

Dhruba abode at the court of Uthanpad. Guru and Rishi, he led Suruchi and her son to the Throne of Grace. Then he left them: God called him.

In the great northern spaces of the sky, God set a Star Throne, and placed Dhruba upon it. Since then, now and for all time, there Dhruba sits, doing the great work God has given him: guiding travellers home until the day comes, when all journeys on this earth will be finished, done. When this earth and all in it will be pervaded, and perfected by the Breath of Divinity, and the souls of men shall be purified, steeped and absorbed in the Divine Truth, Knowledge and Love of God.

When the evening meal is over the women and girls seek their beds, or gather together for card-playing or *Pachisi*. The card games are many and varied, and are a favourite diversion in the zenana. They are invariably played for love, for as a rule zenana women abhor gambling. The interest is unflagging and keen, and barefaced cheating and stratagems are often gaily indulged in to come off victorious, and evoke laughter, indignation and, sometimes, tears!

Pachisi is a game played with counters on a board the shape of a Maltese cross.

At last night and sleep overtake all and close the long-lashed bright eyes of our little sisters in the Purdah.

The old Rajput etiquette: "I speak not of the life behind the Purdah," has been severely ignored in these pages. And since we have lingered within from morn-till eve, let us still loiter about the zenana, and try to enter the hearts therein and strike that chord of sympathy which makes all men akin.

We must clearly understand that Purdah is a Caste distinction adopted for the preservation of the honour of the fair.

There are three castes, Brahman, Khattriya, and Vaishya. All others are Sudra which is no caste at all.

Women of the Brahman and Khattriya castes, which are the priestly and warrior races, have strict Purdah. They can only go abroad in closed carriages enveloped in *chaddars* or veils. In some sects, after her own near male relations a caste woman may be viewed by no man save her husband. During the Marriage Ceremony, after the nuptial knot has been tied (this is done by tying together the corners of the bride's *sari* and the bridegroom's *dhoti*), and the vows taken which are made over the *Om* (consecrated fire), and among some by holding hands and circling seven times round the sacred fire, the bride's veil, always of thick cloth, is raised, not fully raised but merely sufficient to insert a small, new and never-before used mirror. This mirror is held beneath her chin and the bridegroom is told to gaze upon her who is now his, and between them there is now no purdah. Then the looking glass is so held as to reflect his

face, and the bride is commanded to behold her lord and mate, between her and whom in the fullness of time there will be no veil.

Thus our little sister meets her fate, in a mirror! What buried romance, and perhaps what resignation, even tragedy!

The dream of a Hindu girl is to be mated with a husband like Rama, but the choice is not hers, and if Fate sends not a Rama, does she rebel? Rarely. The husband is in truth her lord and even if her heart is not pierced with Cupid's shaft in that first-mirror-reflected glance, she renders wifely obedience, devotion, and unswerving faith fulness.

Few are the tales of matrimonial misery among old-fashioned Hindus. Perhaps the memory of Sana's lameness has something to do with it! But the wife adapts herself to her husband's moods and needs, or rather she is moulded to this adaptation by her mother-in-law. And as a rule Hindu marriages are happy, indeed there are far fewer matrimonial tragedies than among Europeans, and often there is romantic love. The formal marriage ceremony is really more of a solemn betrothal and the courtship follows afterwards. But if the husband

should die before the actual consummation of the marriage the girl is regarded as a widow, and can never be married again. It is generally a few years after the ceremony before the marriage is finally consummated. The little girl goes on long visits to her husband's home, and is treated like a sister, until the time comes when she goes there for good, and a simple ceremony makes her his wife in deed and truth.

Vaishya or women of the trading and agricultural classes have a purdah of two veils. When a Vaishyanee goes abroad, she wears a *chaddar* or veil which covers her body as well as face, same as the *chaddar* of the Brahmanee and Khattriyanee when travelling in a carriage or *palki*. But in place of a closed carriage or palanquin the Vaishyanee is attended by a number of women-servants or slaves who carry a large *purdah* or *chaddar* over her as she walks in their midst to railway carriage, etc.

The *Shudra* has no purdah because she has no caste to fuss about. But purdah is often adopted by Shudra women when wealth has brought leisure and position.

Shudra means all those who are not of the " twice born." There is a Hindu legend

When a Vaishyanee goes abroad.

that at the Creation of the world Brahma threw out the Races of Mankind from various parts of his body. The *Brahman* sprang from his head, the *Khattriyas* from his waist and the *Vaishyas* from his loins, and the *Shudras* from his feet, the lowest and most inferior part of the body.

The "twice born" castes, though they may not openly say so, consider that we Europeans are of the *Shudra* Races, and our freedom from any caste prejudices or restrictions must have actuated this position in the old days when the contact between East and West was a new thing.

Women of the Brahman and Khattriya castes are purdahed from the rest of the house. No man save their own immediate relations and their own men-servants may enter their side of it, or zenana. The husband's father and brothers are debarred in some sects as in Moslem families. If necessity demands their presence, the daughters-in-law, and the sisters-in-law, and the wife too, when others are present, must veil their faces with the edge of their *saris*.

Vaishya women of the trading castes observe the same rules as to dwelling as the Brahman and Khattriya. Vaishya women

of the agricultural classes live in secluded homesteads, and when necessity forces them to move abroad or when they visit each other they do so under cover of the evening shades and in parties, each woman holding her *chaddar* closely around her.

Men-servants who are admitted to work inside the zenana are called "inside servants," and their duties are confined to within the zenana. These servants are generally cooks, temple-servers and factotums, for the zenana woman requires a factotum to enable her to communicate with the outside world of tradespeople. Such men-servants have invariably grown to service in the zenana where they serve, and will be admitted to other zenanas of the same sect if sent with marriage offerings, invitations or when accompanying their mistress who may be visiting.

If such a servant is removed by death, his place is supplied either by a servant from a similar caste zenana, or by a boy who will be taken in and trained to the work. A full-grown "outside" man could never be engaged.

As before said the sole duty of a Hindu wife has sunk to two points: to cook her

husband's food and bear him a son to save his soul. These two ends are the sum total of her life on earth.

The woman who is denied the heaven-sent joy of Motherhood is accursed of the gods! Girls are of no account, as marriage alone makes them true, complete Hindus. It is the son alone who can aid his father in the realms beyond Death. To bear a son is the desire of every Hindu woman, the completion of her life. The happy one who is the mother of sons is a favourite of Heaven.

When one visits a zenana, one of the first questions after the ceremonious reception is over is: How many sons have you? If the visitor is perchance a spinster (mysterious and singular being in the eyes of the zenana!) the question is politely changed to: How many sons has your mother? For the daughter of a mother of sons radiates a reflected glory, until she proves herself cursed by the gods with sterility. Celibacy is incomprehensible to them and in no ways admirable. But voluntary chastity is respected, and, where proved, reverenced, nay worshipped.

To understand the Hindu condemnation of celibacy it is necessary to know the

principles of their faith. First, every Hindu man must marry and have a son to perform the *manes* for his soul. Second, no Hindu girl is confirmed in Hinduism until her marriage, hence the marriages of baby girls.

It is the son, the eldest surviving son, who kindles the fire at his father's bier. Three days after death and cremation, the one follows the other immediately after decease, there is no lying-in-state even for a great man, and very little laying out of the dead. Three days after the cremation a *chirag* (oil lamp) is lit by the dead man's son and floated on the waters of an adjacent river or stream. This *chirag* lights the soul to another "house" or incarnation. Woe betide the unhappy soul who leaves no son to light this death-to-life lamp. Many and dreadful will be its wanderings if it is not plunged in hell forthwith. The passage of the little *chirag* on the waters is regarded as an omen. If it sails safely away out of sight down the stream all is well with the departed soul, a higher state has been réached. If the lamp disappears in the watery eddies, "Hai! hai! doopgya!" (alas! alas! sunk, lost!)

Hence when a son is born Hindus hail the light which has come, and there is great rejoicing that "a son is born." The words for announcing the birth of the looked-for and longed-for son are "Light has come." If death removes the son "Chirag bhut gya" (the light has gone out). All is darkness in that home, none to light the lamp to another life.

A girl is not a complete Hindu till she is married. Should she die before marriage, the soul is lost, her body is not cremated, it is carried out in silence and cast into the nearest stream. But if she is married her corpse is carried forth to cremation, and as it passes to the burning ghat "Ram, Ram, Kutha" (God, receive this soul) is called aloud. Her husband or his son holds the torch to her bier and lights her soul to another abode.

If a boy child dies before receiving the rites of Hinduism the body is not cremated, but thrown into the nearest stream or buried in silence.

About the age of five and sometimes earlier, a boy undergoes the first ceremony. The head is shaved, leaving a wisp of hair at the crown. This wisp is the distinctive

mark of a Hindu. Whenever the hair is subsequently cut, this strand remains untouched. It is often worn *plaited* and is known as the *chotee* (plait).

After the *Mundun* the boy is not allowed to receive cooked food or water from the hands of any but those of the right degree of caste, either equal or superior caste. He may sometimes receive fruit from the hands of one who is honoured by the family.

The *Janu* or concluding rite of Hinduism is given to a boy when about the age of twelve. The *Janu* is a strand of seven threads worn badge-wise across the chest. Five of these threads are given at the *Janu* or Thread Ceremony, and the remaining two are received by the boy during his marriage ceremony for his wife, and he wears them for her salvation. Thus a girl is made a true Hindu and admitted to the privileges of Hinduism in the hereafter. After death her body is submitted to the purifying flames of fire, a *chirag* will be lighted to light her freed spirit to another incarnation, and *Shrad* (Requiem service) will be celebrated in her konour on her death anniversary.

In the Thread Ceremony the boy is regarded as, and receives the honours of a

Bridegroom. After the bath of purification, which must be preceded by a fast, he is dressed in the sacred yellow and seated before the *Om* or fire, and after the customary offering to the gods and the prescribed prayers in Sanscrit the *Janu* is placed around his neck. This first *Janu* is made of threads of pure gold, and is afterwards changed for one of cotton, and the golden one is made into a ring or other ornament for him.

After placing the Thread upon the boy the *Guru* exhorts him to fidelity in the practice of Hinduism, filial devotion, reverence for King and rightful authority, and gives detailed advice on certain observations and every-day acts, as washing the hands before and after eating, and after performing various functions of the body; when to use mud as well as water for purification and when to use water only.

After the *Janu* is placed on him, the boy is dressed in bridal red and carried in procession through the town or village attended by light bearers and fanwavers, and there is general feasting and rejoicing in his family circle. All relations who can be there are present, and all friends, even Europeans, are invited to the feasts, but of course there

is a separate dining room for any European guests and no Hindu eats with them.

Brahmans and beggars are fed and money and clothes are distributed to them by the father of the happy lad, for he is considered happy, to have lived to receive the golden *Janu.* Trays of sweetmeats are sent to absent members of the family as well as to those who are able to be present. New cloth and clothes are distributed to relations and all the servants of the house.

I was once present at a *Janu* ceremony in the house of some Koolin Brahmans. The boy came of an old and refined family and was exceedingly good-looking. He reminded me of a young Greek hero when, after receiving the Holy Thread, he stepped from the Puja *choka* (square) to perform the rite of begging. After the ceremony was concluded he was carried to a prepared place by his father, to rest and refresh before the Procession. His mother, sisters, aunts, and cousins crowded round him to see his *Janu,* just the same as many want to see the Bride's ring. His little sister asked: "Brother, how do you feel now you are a *pura* (complete) Brahman?"

" Oh ! I feel tired and hungry," was the unenthusiastic reply, at which the elder women laughed delightedly and hastened to place their lovingly prepared dainties before him, his mother sitting beside him to feed him, and each vying with the other to press delicacies upon him.

The little sister looked on attentively at her brother's healthy conjuring away of the eatables, wondering at his absence of spirituality and then piped out : " The Commissioner Sahib Bahadoor has lent his elephant for you to ride on in your procession. Oh, brother, do ask father that I may go with you."

" Run and ask," said the boy, and she darted off to obtain the required permission.

Later the entire household of women, I in their midst, gathered in an upper verandah where, from behind the purdahs, we watched the neophyte and his wee sister mount the gaily-caparisoned elephant and ride away to receive the acclamations of the town.

To understand these practices and observances is to understand the Hindu and makes clear how the practice of Child Marriage arose, and the necessity of marriage

for every girl. For should she die unmarried the parents who have neglected to marry their daughter at the appointed time, have slain her soul, and to prevent this calamity the time of marriage has often been forestalled.

The depths of this belief may be gauged by the term bestowed upon a married woman. It is *Devi*, goddess, and if the mother of a son, then she is *Devi* indeed, favoured one of Heaven! *Kumari* (virgin) is the term applied to an unmarried girl and *Bewa* or *Rand* the designation for a widow.

Dire and abject woe for a girl if death snatches away the boy-husband before a son has blessed her womb. The blackness and desolation of such premature widowhood cannot be realised by European women unless they have been within and witnessed it. It is terrible. Hindu widows say: "The flames of *sati* burned for a moment and then bliss with the beloved. But now he departs and for me a long and black life, no flames, but wringing and wringing of the heart to the very last drop of life. O! death comes slowly to the widow whose one desire is death."

A Widow offering fire before the sacred *Tulsi* (Basil plant).

I cannot close my book without giving an instance of how our English Royal Family is venerated in the zenanas of India.

When King Edward passed away I was working in a zenana. The Rani was a Government ward and I carried her desire to the Collector that she might offer her sympathy to the widowed Queen Alexandra.

Later Her Gracious Majesty wrote to Lady Minto asking her to thank the Purdah Ladies of India for their condolences. The Royal letter was lithographed and translations of it made into the various vernaculars, and a copy with the necessary translation forwarded to each zenana from whence messages of sympathy had been sent.

One morning after I had left the zenana and returned to my own house for my breakfast, I got an imperious summons back to the Raj-Bari. "Come, Miss Saheb," said the boy who brought the Rani Saheba's *salaam*. "You are wanted very quickly. There is very important work."

I went over to the zenana wondering what had happened, and entered. The maid-servants stood in an awestruck group in the courtyard. Near the verandah the two

Brahman cooks and the temple server stood with hands reverently joined. Rani Saheba's grandfather whom I had left at Puja, stood at the edge of the verandah, still clad in his silken Puja *dhoti* (cloth), with his rosary in hand and tears streaming down his withered cheeks.

"Look, Miss Saheb, look," he said on seeing me, and could say no more. His emotion overpowered him.

Near the *tuktaposh* (sitting place) stood Rani Saheba, her mother, grandmother, and two daughters, all with hands reverently clasped and bowed heads.

I stood and looked at them. Then I asked: "Rani Saheba, what is it"?

She tried to speak but burst into tears, and her companions all sobbed with her. But her mother and Baba-ji, the old grandfather, were pointing to the *tuktaposh*, and I looked there.

On a red velvet cushion lay a large sheet of note paper with a heavy black edge. I drew nearer to it, and saw a crown engraved in black. I looked at Rani Saheba again. She had recovered her composure and said:

"Read it, Miss Saheb, we have read it in *Devanagari* (written Hindi)." And she signed towards a printed translation which lay on the *tuktaposh* near the cushion.

"Touch it as little as you can," begged Baba-ji. "Think of her condescension, her kind thought when the blackness of widowhood struck her with a heavy hand and swept away husband, King and state."

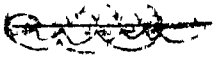
I read the Royal letter and laid it gently back. The whole happening impressed me vividly. The air was heavy with grief, emotion and reverence. My thought was "If Queen Alexandra could see this, such sympathy might comfort her heart a little."

Then Bohu-ji spoke. "Fancy *Rajmatha* (the King's mother) writing this letter with her own hand and thinking of the little Purdahnashins in Hindustan. But the hearts of Kings and Queens are like God's. They know and understand."

That lithograph copy of Queen Alexandra's letter was carefully framed and placed in the *Toshakhana*, treasure room, and will be handed on through the generations.

That little scene and the sad one I witnessed when I carried the news of King

Edward's death into that same zenana will never be effaced from my memory. And I often wish that the knowledge which I have gained of the Indian heart might be shared by others. For though India is geographically, politically, commercially known to the British, the wonderful, living, warm, palpitating India is still an unread book. It lies hidden, inside, behind the Purdah of the Purdah.



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on 20 February, 2020